Letter from Taizé

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EUROPEAN MEETING OF YOUNG ADULTS
28 Dec 89 - 2 Jan 90
POLAND Wrocław
TAIZÉ

see pages 2 and 3

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Making the earth fit to live in:

Human solidarity

During the intercontinental meetings in Taizé, one topic comes up again and again. Each participant is invited to share, in small groups, their experience of human solidarity. The reflection is greatly enhanced by the presence of young people from the Southern continents, who are often familiar with situations of great poverty and who are committed to working for solutions to different problems of development.

Each week, one of the workshops dealt with these questions. Here are some echos collected by Leon, from Lubumbashi (Zaire), who animated the meeting during the summer:

"The evangelist Matthew tells us that at the end of time, one question will be asked of us: 'I was hungry, thirsty, in prison, naked, a stranger...' what did you do for me? (cf. Matt 25,31-46). In other words: were you in solidarity with your neighbours; did you help them, offer them shelter?"

JESUS AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN (John 4)

We know that today, many of our contemporaries are hungry and thirsty. Especially in the poorer countries, many families only eat a single meal a day, and famine is a reality. Many people are in need of clothes to wear.

We pass by homeless people or those whose homes are rudimentary, but also the outcast, lonely people, prisoners... And this is true in Third World countries as well as in the developped lands where the «Fourth World» is growing.

There are thus people who are not really at home on this earth; for them it is not habitable. How can we take up this challenge? Two aspects of solidarity seem important to me: solidarity as being-with, and solidarity as sharing.

Solidarity is rooted in the union with God that is the source of all our activities, an intimate and constant union. It is also the union with other human beings who, like me, are involved in the same mission of making the earth a place fit to live in.

In the Bantu culture of central Africa, solidarity as union is an everyday reality and it is even reflected in the language.

To say that he has something - a shirt, a house, a friend or a brother - a Bantu will say that he "is with" a shirt, a house, a friend or a brother. This relationship of being-with is still deeper with the Creator.

Solidarity is also sharing, sharing of what we are and of what we have. A gift retains its value and bears fruit when it is given. The parable of the talents explains that what we have received, what we are in our depths, is meant to bear fruit.

Each person represents a unique gift of God for others, since no two people are alike. Being with others, accepting simply to be present in the midst of those with whom God has placed us, can be the best way of giving ourselves.

Our knowledge, our affection, our physical strength, our time and our possessions are among the gifts we can share with others.

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Christmas

Around the child Jesus, we pray with Mary, the shepherds and the magi. The child Jesus was already the Word made flesh in fullness, who dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, to show us the Father (cf. John 1).

The shepherds were poor people, the first to whom God communicated his joy. Awakened in the middle of the night, they hurried to find Christ. They shared in the song of the angels: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to human beings, the objects of God's favour!" (Luke 2,8-14).

The Virgin Mary pondered in her heart and contemplated the One who came to fulfill all God's promises (Luke 2,16-20).

This prayer can be used at the departure for the European meeting in Poland or during the journey there, as well as wherever people want to take part in the pilgrimage of trust.

Songs

Gloria, gloria in excelsis Deo /
Laudate omnes gentes /
Misericordias Domini /
Cantate Domino

Psalm 34,1-6.8.10

I will bless the Lord at all times;
God's praise always on my lips.
My soul will boast in the Lord;
let the humble hear and rejoice.

Come and glorify the Lord;
together let us exalt God's name.
I looked for the Lord, and he answered,
delivering me from all my fears.

All who look to God will be radiant,
their faces not covered with shame.
A poor man cried out and God heard,
and saved him from all his distress.

Taste and see how good is the Lord;
happy those who take refuge in God.
The rich may grow weak and hungry,
but those who seek God will lack nothing.

Gospel

John 3,16-17

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Chant

Stay with us /
In our darkness

Silence

Prayer of adoration

Adoramus te, Domine

God the Father, you sent your beloved Son to reconcile all things through him, we worship you...
God the Son, you shared our humanity, we worship you...
God the Son, you open for us the road to peace of heart by the gift of your life and by your forgiveness, we worship you...
God the Holy Spirit, you descended upon Christ in whom all fullness dwells, we worship you...
God the Holy Spirit, you fill our hearts with the Father's love, we worship you...
O Christ, by your incarnation and birth you make us love our human condition, we worship you...
O Christ, by your hidden life you unite your life to ours, we worship you...
O Christ, by your faithfulness you make each of us faithful to our vocation, we worship you...
...

Lord's Prayer

Prayer

Jesus Christ, Risen Lord, we wish to root our lives in your mysterious presence. And so we draw from the wellsprings of trust in you, from the wellsprings of the faith of your Church.

And what do we discover? That our humble prayer consists above all in waiting, in the steps of Mary, the apostles and the cloud of witnesses down to today — longing for the realities of God sometimes already hidden deep within us.

And then we realize that every human being is precious in your sight. And even when we remain far from you, Christ, you are always present; you are always searching for us.

Songs

Sanctum nomen Domini /
In the Lord

The songs of Taizé are available in UK from Collins Liturgical Publications, 8 Grafton Street, London W1X 3LA, and in North America from GIA Publications, 7404 S. Mason Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

European meeting in **Poland**

In a few weeks the European meeting in Poland will begin. At present, final preparations are taking place in Poland and in all the cities of Eastern and Western Europe from which pilgrims will set out. In Wroclaw itself, the preparation is set in a special context, marked by both hope linked to political changes and apprehension concerning the economic situation. Those who are preparing the meeting there sent the following letter:

"We are sharing so many beautiful experiences that it is hard to choose one. However, the last pilgrimage we took part in is worth telling about in detail.

"Each year, young people and students are invited to walk the thirty kilometres that separate Wroclaw from Trzebnica, where Saint Hedwig, the patron of Lower Silesia, lived and is buried. What a surprise to find at 6 am, in front of the cathedral of Wroclaw, thousands of young people praying, ready to set out!

"We recognized many faces because meetings of preparation and information had already taken place in most of the seventy parishes of the city. These meetings throughout Wroclaw showed us with what enthusiasm the welcome for the European meeting was being prepared in parishes and families.

"On the morning of the pilgrimage, when we began walking, we found ourselves first of all in the company of scouts. They will prepare tea for everyone during the European meeting, and this hot drink will be necessary since the meals will be taken outdoors. During the first part of the pilgrimage, in the centre of Wroclaw, we passed many people who greeted the young pilgrims.

"We noticed, in front of the shops, many people who had risen very early in the hope of spending less time waiting in line for food. It has become very hard for people to find provisions, and in Poland food prices keep rising.

"Groups of 500 young people quickly formed, like a series of caravans. We were invited to go from one to the next, to introduce a prayer and a Bible reflection.

"While they were walking, the young people were asked to meditate on the theme of our pilgrimage with Christ. Reading the parable of the Good Shepherd (Luke 10) helps us understand that we are already walking with Christ along the road of fulfilment, to the extent that we look at other people in the same way that he does.

"Spontaneously, as we passed a barracks of Soviet soldiers, hands waved in greeting. This tiny gesture accompanied our reflection on what each of us can do to leave mistrust behind, and to take a step towards others.

"The pilgrimage brought us close to a large parish. A few days earlier, a meeting with young people and families had taken place there. We learned that they had found 600 places to welcome participants in the European meeting. These parish visits helped us discover the diversity of commitments and movements.

"One of the riches of the European meeting will be the chance to meet each morning with those in charge of these different activities. Many Polish people want the preparation for the meeting to help their parishes to understand more deeply the meaning of hospitality. They are proposing to families to have a time of prayer together. In one parish, an icon goes each day from family to family.

"By journeying together, especially when we began to feel our tiredness, we understood better that our personal pilgrimage with Christ is linked to that of a whole people; we support one another. When it began to rain at the end of the afternoon, people helped one another so that no one slipped, shared umbrellas, protected each other from the wind, took turns pushing someone in a wheelchair, kept the singing going...

"In this way solidarity was lived out naturally. In Wroclaw we have often met people who are very attentive to those excluded. In helping others, they are very concerned that each be recognized with their particular gifts.

"A pilgrimage is a continuous prayer, sustained by singing, with times of intense recollection. At one stage, we evoked the passion and resurrection of Christ with the fourteen stations of the way of the cross. Here in Poland, the churches are usually too small for those who attend the Sunday liturgy.

"Part of the congregation always has to stand outdoors, whatever the weather, following the celebration by means of loudspeakers. New churches or rooms for catechism are being constructed almost everywhere.

"As we discover the people of Poland whose faithfulness to common prayer renews their attachment to Christ, we receive a glimpse of what will be the significance and importance of the times of prayer during the European meeting." ■

• Those taking part in the European meeting will probably all be able to stay in families, but it is still necessary to bring sleeping bags and air mattresses, since homes are small. • The families will be happy to offer hospitality and will do so generously. If you want to give them something, you can bring with you small symbolic gifts, for example photographs or something typical of your region. • If you wish to provide more substantial assistance to the Polish people (medicine or food), a central place will be indicated when you arrive where you can bring the gifts you have brought. These gifts will then be distributed to those most in need.

"Lord, teach us to pray"

Here is the sixth Bible introduction on the Lord's Prayer, given in Taizé each morning by one of the brothers. The young people who take part in the intercontinental meetings in Taizé have the possibility of joining such a "Bible group".

"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"

When we attempt to live fully in God's today, one of the difficulties comes from our past, with our mistakes, our regrets, the wounds we have inflicted or received — all the excess baggage that weighs us down and impedes our journey forward. For this reason, the second great gift we ask of God, after that of bread, is the gift of forgiveness, in other words God's love that recreates us, that makes it possible for us to begin again by taking from our shoulders the burdens of the past.

The Bible employs different images to speak about human failings. In the Gospel, Jesus often uses the image of a debt to be paid. The parable of the talents (Matt 25,14ff) can help us to understand this image.

Before leaving on a journey, a rich man entrusts his money to three servants, to each according to their abilities. Two of them use the money to make more. The third servant is paralyzed by fear, and so hides his money in a hole in the ground. When he returns, the master praises the first two servants and criticizes the third one.

In other words, for Jesus, what is serious is not using the gifts which God has placed in us, forgetting God's trust in us and God's call to continue his work in the world. In addition,the image of cancelling a debt (cf. Matt 18,23ff) emphasizes the definitive quality of God's forgiveness. When a debt is forgiven, the matter is over and done with; no obligation remains.

The certainty that God forgives, that the Lord is a merciful God, is not specific to the New Testament. From the beginning, the people of Israel were convinced of God's mercy. The word mercy is even part of the name of God (Ex 34,6). It is true that Jesus, by giving his life on the cross, shows us how far God's forgiveness goes, that it is offered to all with no strings attached.

Saint Luke expresses what is new in the Gospel in these words: "Be merciful as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6,36). Put another way, what is truly new is not that God forgives, but that human beings can forgive like God, in God's image!

Jesus knows that the human heart tends to divide people into two categories (cf. Luke 6,32ff), friends and enemies (or those who are indifferent), but he asks us to love even our enemies, and makes it possible for us to do so by the gift of his love, of his own Spirit.

For Jesus, God's love is always first; God loves us first. The disinterested love that human beings are invited to show is a consequence of their openness to God's love, to God's Spirit. Saint John reminds us of this in no uncertain terms:

"We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, «I love God,» yet hates his brothers and sisters, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother or sister, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must love his brothers and sisters." (1 John 4,19-21)

Our love and forgiveness for our fellow human beings are the sign that our love for God is authentic. They also show how well we have understood God's love for us. "Whoever loves...knows God" (1 John 4,7). Jesus' command is thus not an order, but a gift by which Christ's loving presence for every human being becomes a reality.

We would misunderstand this petition of the Lord's Prayer if we imagined that God forgives us as a reward for our own, human ability to forgive. The fact that four times the word "us/our" is mentioned tells us clearly that this is the prayer of people who have already experienced God's love for them, a love which has made possible a new relationship among human beings.

In other words this is the prayer of the Church, the community of those who "know and believe in the love God has for us" (1 John 4,16). And to underline the permanent presence of God's forgiveness, independently of our subjective feelings, the Church has set apart men to proclaim this forgiveness in Christ's name in the sacrament of reconciliation.

Of course we constantly experience the fact that it is not easy to forgive, that our forgiveness is so limited in comparison to what God has given us. But in this petition, Jesus encourages us to give the little we have so that God can continue to give us more of his love. If we have been deeply wounded, often we cannot forgive the other right away. Yet already the desire to be able to forgive is a real beginning; it is the miracle of God in us.

What is truly new is not that God forgives, but that human beings can forgive like God, in God's image!

Johannine hours

John 1,29

Johannine hours are suggested as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer, in the midst of our life at home. During the course of the day take a couple of hours to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, the group (3 to 10 people) meet together to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

"The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and he said: There is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1,29). The Gospel shows us the meeting between Jesus and John the Baptist. In this encounter, which is also the first manifestation of Christ, Jesus is present as the one who "comes toward", and in these few words his true identity is revealed: he is the One who is sent, and his life consists in "going towards".

"Going towards" is a way of expressing kindness. The prophet Isaiah, who inspired Saint John in writing the first chapter of his Gospel, had announced this coming of God and explained its purpose: "Comfort, comfort my people" (40,1). To a crushed and discouraged nation, seeing no way out of its difficulties, the prophet proclaimed: "The Lord God is coming with power" (40,10). The word power here is not a threat. It expresses the determination with which God comes to rescue his people.

Jesus appears at the beginning of his ministry with this same determination, and that is why the Gospel presents him as the one who can take away the sins of the world. No matter how numerous the obstacles may be, they will not prevent him from saving, from redeeming, from healing. Even if there are mountains and hills between God and humanity, they will be levelled in him. A way of communion will be opened up.

How can this text from Saint John help me to understand other Gospel texts? In what way does it change the image we have of God?

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

Meditating on the Word

January

1 Mon **Jn 14.26-27**
Christ came to announce the joyful message of peace: peace to those who are far away, peace to those who are near. Through him, in one Spirit, we all have free access to the Father. Ep 2.14-18

2 Tue Mk 2.13-14
Your God is with you. He will quiet you with his love, he will dance with joy for you. **Zp 3.14-18**

3 Wed 1 Jn 1.5b-7
God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through him. **Jn 3.16-17**

4 Thu Is 65.1
Jesus said: Whoever acts according to the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he is doing is done in God. **Jn 3.18-21**

5 Fri **Jn 1.19-23**
God will guide his people in joy, with the mercy and saving justice that come from him. Ba 5.1-9

6 Sat Jn 1.9-13
EPIPHANY
Our Saviour, Christ Jesus, has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. **2 Tm 1.9-10**

7 SUN Ep 3.2-3a,5-6
When they saw the star, the wise men were filled with a great joy. As they entered, they saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they knelt down and worshipped him. **Mt 2.1-12**

8 Mon Ac 10.34-38
When Jesus had been baptized, he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice came from heaven: This is my Son, the Beloved, my favour rests on him. **Mt 3.13-17**

9 Tue **Lk 3.1-6**
In the beginning, God created heaven and earth. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Gn 1.1-5

10 Wed 1 Jn 5.5-9
John the Baptist said to the people: Anyone who has two tunics must share with the one who has none. And anyone with something to eat must do the same. **Lk 3.7-14**

11 Thu Tt 1.1-4
John the Baptist said: I baptise you with water, but one stronger than I is coming and he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. **Lk 3.15-20**

12 Fri Gn 2.4b-7
Jesus said to the tempter: It is written: "Worship the Lord your God, him alone must you serve." **Lk 4.1-13**

13 Sat Lk 4.14-21
When the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his merciful love. **Tt 3.4-7**

14 SUN Is 49.3,5-6
John the Baptist saw Jesus coming towards him and said: There is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. **Jn 1.29-34**

15 Mon Lk 4.22-30
The Lord said to Abraham, "Leave your country, your kinsfolk and your father's house for the land I will show you." And Abraham set out, as the Lord had told him. **Gn 12.1-4a**

16 Tue Lk 4.31-37
God is faithful and has called you to live in communion with his Son, Jesus Christ. **1 Co 1.7-9**

17 Wed 1 Co 1.17-25
Jesus said: I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God, because that is why I was sent. **Lk 4.42-44**

18 Thu Gn 32.23-31
Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch." "Master," Simon replied, "we have worked hard all night long without catching anything, but because you say so I will let down the nets." **Lk 5.1-11**

19 Fri Lk 5.17-26
We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that comes from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us **1 Co 2.10-12**

20 Sat 1 Co 2.13-16
Jesus said: It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance. **Lk 5.27-32**

21 SUN 1 Co 1.10-13,17
Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of people." And at once they left their nets and followed him. **Mt 4.12-23**

22 Mon Lk 5.33-39
The Lord says: I have seen the misery of my people. I have heard them crying out because of their oppressors, yes, I know their suffering. **Ex 3.7-8a,10-12**

23 Tue Lk 6.1-11
Do you not know that you are God's temple and that the Spirit of God lives in you? **1 Co 3.10-11,16**

24 Wed 1 Co 3.18-23
At that time, Jesus went up into the hills to pray and he spent the whole night praying to God. **Lk 6.12-19**

25 Thu 1 Co 4.1-5
Looking at his disciples, Jesus said: Happy are you who are poor, the kingdom of God is yours. **Lk 6.20-23**

26 Fri Lk 6.27-35
We are fools for Christ. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we offer comfort in return. **1 Co 4.9-13**

27 Sat Ex 33.11-14,17
Jesus said: Give, and it will be given to you. A full measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you use will be the measure used for you. **Lk 6.36-38**

28 SUN Zp 2.3;3.12-13
Jesus said: Happy are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be filled. Happy are the merciful, for mercy will be shown to them. **Mt 5.1-12**

29 Mon Lk 6.39-42
Anyone who unites themselves to the Lord is one spirit with him. **1 Co 6.17,19-20a**

30 Tue **Lk 6.46-49**
You will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him if you search for him with all your heart and all your soul. Dt 4.12,29-31

31 Wed 1 Co 9.16-18
A centurion said to Jesus: Say the word, and my servant will be healed. **Lk 7.1-10**

Febuary

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

1 Thu Lk 7.11-17
Moses told the people: What I command you today is not too difficult for you nor beyond your reach. The Word is very near you, it is on your lips and in your heart for you to put it into practice.
Dt 30.11-14

2 Fri Ml 3.1
PRESENTATION OF THE LORD
When Simeon saw the child Jesus, he praised God and said: Now, Lord, you can let your servant depart in peace as you promised. For my eyes have seen the salvation you have prepared for all people to see. **Lk 2.22-32**

3 Sat Lk 7.24-28
God finds his people in the desert, in a barren wasteland. He shields them and cares for them, he guards them as the apple of his eye. **Dt 32.10-12**

4 SUN 1 Co 2.1-5
Jesus said to his disciples: You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. **Mt 5.13-16**

5 Mon Lk 7.36-50
Seek God in simplicity of heart; for he reveals himself to those who do not mistrust him. **Ws 1.1-3,7**

6 Tue Lk 8.1-8
Let no one seek their own interest, but rather the good of others. Whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.
1 Co 10.23-24,31-11.2

7 Wed **Lk 8.11-15**
God created human beings for an everlasting life, he made them in the image of his own nature.
Ws 2.23; 3.1-5a

8 Thu **Lk 8.19-21**
There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Spirit; there are different ways of serving, but it is the same Lord; there are many forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who is at work in them all.
1 Co 12.4-11

9 Fri Lk 8.38-39
Just as the body is one though it has many parts, so it is with Christ. We were all baptized into one body in one Spirit. **1 Co 12.12-13**

10 Sat Ws 7.15-17
Jesus said to the woman he had healed: Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace.
Lk 8.43-48

11 SUN 1 Co 2.6-10
Jesus said: If you are bringing you offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering.
Mt 5.17-37

12 Mon Lk 8.49-56
God's wisdom is a reflection of the eternal light, an untarnished mirror of his active power and image of his goodness. **Ws 7.21-26**

13 Tue Lk 9.1-6
Even if I can understand all mysteries and know all things, even if I have the faith to move mountains, if I am without love I am nothing.
1 Co 13.1-7

14 Wed Lk 9.10-17
Paul writes: These three things remain: Faith, hope and love. And the greatest of them is love.
1 Co 13.8-13

15 Thu 1 Co 15.1-8
Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "The Christ of God."
Lk 9.18-22

16 Fri **Lk 9.23-25**
The children you love, Lord, will learn that it is not the crops of the earth that provide nourishment, but your word that supports all who believe in you. Ws 16.20,26

17 Sat Lk 9.28-36
As it was that death came through one man, so through one man has come the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.
1 Co 15.21-24

18 SUN Lv 19.1-2,17-18
Jesus said: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. **Mt 5.38-48**

19 Mon **Lk 9.43-48**
Paul writes: I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength. By calling me into his service he has considered me trustworthy. 1 Tm 1.12-16

Meditating on the Word

20 Tue Si 2.7-11
Someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus answered, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." **Lk 9.51-58**

21 Wed Lk 9.59-62
There is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself a human being, who gave himself for all. **1 Tm 2.5-8**

22 Thu Lk 10.1-9
Happy are they who are not in anguish over their failings and who do not founder in despair. For if they are hard upon themselves, to whom will they be kind?
Si 14.1-2,5-6

23 Fri **Lk 10.17-22**
Paul writes: The point of all our toiling and battling is that we have put our trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all people.
1 Tm 4.8-11

24 Sat Lk 10.23-28
Paul writes to Timothy: You have in you a spiritual gift which was given to you. Do not neglect it.
1 Tm 4.12-16

25 SUN Is 49.14-15
Jesus said: Seek first God's kingdom and his justice, and all the other things will be given you in addition. **Mt 6.24-34**

26 Mon Si 17.1-3,7-12
Having told the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus asked the teacher of the law, "Who showed themselves to be a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" He replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."
Lk 10.29-37

27 Tue Lk 10.38-42
Paul writes to Timothy: Fight the good fight of faith and win the eternal life to which you were called.
1 Tm 6.11-12

28 Wed Jl 2.12-13
Mt 6.1-6,16-18
ASH WEDNESDAY
We are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were making his appeal through us. And we implore you in the name of Christ: be reconciled to God. Now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation. 2 Co 5.20-6.2

Johannine hours

Matthew 6,25-34

Johannine hours are suggested as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer, in the midst of our life at home. During the course of the day take a couple of hours to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, the group (3 to 10 people) meet together to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

A call to search can inspire different reactions. Some will respond with anxiety: will I manage? What if I do not find anything? Or if I do not search in the right way?

It is striking to see how positive the notion of seeking is for Christ. For him, it is never linked to despairing or worrying. For this reason, in the very same passage he can say to his disciples "Don't worry" (Matt 6,25.34) and then immediately afterwards add: "Seek" (v. 33).

Don't worry... but seek. If Jesus can speak in this way, that is because the object of the search is already given. The realities of God are not inaccessible; they are present, close at hand, and Jesus explains why: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom" (Luke 12,32). Seeking means first of all looking with Christ toward the One who is pleased to give (11,9-10). It means realizing that God does not give a snake to whoever asks for a fish, a scorpion to whoever asks for an egg (Luke 11,13).

For Jesus, confident trust and searching are not opposed. The call not to worry does not put us to sleep; the invitation to search never sets us on the road of fear. The confidence that we shall find drives out anxiety and, instead of causing worry, searching can become, again and again, a joyful adventure.

Our ability to trust is often wounded and hesitating. What does God offer us to heal us and to turn our life and our searching into a creation with him?

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Making the earth fit to live in: **Human solidarity**

Some people are aware that sharing begins with little things: for example, making friends with the neighbours in my building, greeting those in the same lift with me, visiting elderly people who are often alone (perhaps my own grandparents), assisting foreigners in my neighbourhood, simplifying my lifestyle, etc.

Making the earth a place for everyone means ensuring that everyone feels at home, that my neighbours feel, when they meet me, that we are brothers and sisters.

Everyone can ask themselves these questions: What forms of solidarity are urgent in my situation, in my town or district? What can I do in my own way? Listening to other people can encourage us, and many of those in Taizé this summer recounted what they are doing at home:

- Roberto et Joao-Batiste from Brazil teach adults to read and write in their parish every evening.

- Liliana from Peru is a lawyer, and a member of the diocesan commission for legal affairs; she works to defend the poorest, especially families of those who have disappeared.

- Eugene from Rwanda visits prisoners, simply to be with them, sometimes helping them get in touch with their families or bringing them songbooks; he is astonished to discover that, when they leave prison, they come to thank him.

- Young adults from Bari, Italy, of the parish of Santa Scolastica, hold a prayer each evening and visit refugees in small groups as well as organizing meals for lonely persons.

The European meeting in Poland will be another concrete way of deepening this solidarity. Crossing frontiers for several days of life together in prayer and listening will be an eloquent sign of this being-together where each person brings what is most unique: their own self.

Over the past ten years, the Polish people who will be welcoming us have expressed in a special way faithfulness to a tireless commitment to making the earth a better place. For them, solidarity is much more than a symbol.

The Poland meeting could be an opportunity for all of us to discover the roots of that perseverance, so that solidarity may grow and reach beyond other borders." ■

We remember you, Risen Jesus, who enable us to welcome your Holy Spirit. In turning towards you, we penetrate the indescribable treasure of the realities of the Gospel: a solidarity with the trials of the human family and also the joy of a communion that draws its strength from a life with you, Christ.

prayer by Brother Roger

Senegal

Literacy and training

The year 1990 was declared the world year of literacy by the UN. Among those working for a better world, many are involved in forms of grass-roots education such as literacy training.

In the following article Fidel, a young man from Senegal who has been in charge of a network of groups teaching people to read and write for the past two years in Dakar, describes his work:

"This experience, rather ordinary at the beginning, was undertaken with no other resources but the conviction and the perseverance of a few people of good will. At the beginning, our goal was to teach the young school dropouts in our district to read, write and do arithmetic.

"But quickly other needs became evident and we had to broaden our activities. In addition to boys and girls on the street,we have had to work with apprentices in different occupations and unwed mothers who are abandoned and lack basic resources.

"In addition to reading, writing and arithmetic, a literate person is better able to cope with his or her environment, activity and job; it is a giant step on the road to development. For example, a mother learns how to keep a family budget or how to administer medicine to her children.

"Another important category is that of the physically handicapped. We are trying to enable them to earn their living and to become more a part of society. For example, we have a sewing workshop run by a handicapped woman that is also a means of teaching others.

"We are also looking for possibilities for the most abandoned street children to become apprentices. We have opened a small suitcase factory using second-hand material as well as a carpentry shop. Others are learning how to grow vegetables.

"After two years, some results are already visible. Some have learned rapidly, children have been reintegrated into their families, some have given up drugs or prostitution. This is always a cause of great joy to the volunteer teachers.

"Even if our activity has often been met with incomprehension from the authorities and the police, we have found our strength in Christ, with the certainty that he is the one who has entrusted this mission to us. He is our reference and our hope for making the earth a place fit to live in." ■

Listening to the CONTINENTS

Netherlands

Sowing seeds of the future

A young man from Zaire travelled in the Netherlands, invited by several parishes:

"From the beginning of my visit to the Netherlands, we visited a high school and spoke to some classes. When I began to talk about my country, the students quickly asked other questions, which obviously were of more interest to them: Why believe in God? What's the use of it? Are those who believe better than others? Why does the Church exist?

"It was the first time in my life that I was questioned in such a direct way about my faith. I did not try to answer all the questions. I felt that sharing my own experience would be a deeper response.

"I therefore told of the journey that had led me to find a lasting joy, an inner peace. I explained how the Word of God had become for me a help to be freer, more responsible. I especially tried to show how the Church for me was that presence of Christ, his Body, of which each Christian is a full member. How could a member withdraw from it without becoming withered? For example in my diocese, fifteen years ago, the young people, exasperated, stopped going to church. But the day they realized that they had a role to play with other Christians, the liturgy became more alive. There was an awakening.

"I was astonished at the direct questions of those young people. In calling into question their society, they had a deep desire to be listened to and to have their aspirations taken seriously.

"Later on, I was invited to a celebration in a parish. What a joy to see young people, children and adults all together! When we shared with one another, I sensed a strong will to accomplish something together, for each to bring their own contribution, especially since the priest was an elderly man. One of their concerns was to find a way out of isolation, to go towards others.

"Several families offered me hospitality. Each time, it was possible to share in depth, about faith, about the Christian education of children, about how hard it was to find time for prayer. These simple conversations, sharing our different insights, enabled me above all to encourage them when they admitted, as they so often did, that results are not visible in the short term.

"In meeting people, young and old, who were persevering, I thought of the words of the psalm: «Those who sow in tears harvest in song.» And I admired those witnesses who were sowing, who were advancing,who were looking forward, confident that the fruit already lies hidden in what they are doing today." ■

Syria

A mosaic of communities

A young man from Alep in Syria, who took part in the intercontinental meetings in Taizé, had this to say:

"The presence of Christians in Syria goes back to the time of the apostles. Since the days when Saint Paul came to Damascus and began his mission there, nineteen centuries have gone by. This long continuity gives us a strong sense of tradition. We have gained a love of the treasures of the expressions of faith that have gone through many trials and have resisted the passing of time: the celebration of the liturgy, often in Aramaic, the language of Jesus,the veneration of icons and of the holy witnesses that have gone before us. It is true that today this patrimony is a bit asleep.

"In my country, the Christians are a minority, an island in the ocean of the Muslim community, and many have emigrated. Because of the war in Lebanon, many families whose members are on both sides are separated. We pray constantly that peace may once again come to this region.

"Beyond the question of co-existing with Islam, the Christian Church in Syria is a mosaic of different communities: different Orthodox patriarchates, Catholics, Armenians, Anglicans, etc. This does not create conflicts. The groups sometimes are mistrustful of one another but there is also, I think, a real desire to meet. And there are young people who come together beyond their denominational affiliation, for example in groups or movements. When I return to my country, I would like to help these young people become aware of the communion that exists between them and invite them to commit themselves more deeply as witnesses of a possible reconciliation.

"Personally, I belong to a group where each member gives some of their time each week to visit poor and lonely people in prisons, hospitals, homes for the elderly, etc.

"When I came to Europe, I had the impression that people were very lonely. Where I live, what Europeans may call curiosity is simply solidarity: in Arab culture, it is normal to be attentive to one's neighbours, even if you do not know them very well. If someone looks sad or tired, people ask them what's wrong and what they can do to help. For example, if a family is in mourning, many people come and spontaneously offer to help in many different ways: with shopping, cooking, or simply by being present. This goes on for weeks or even months. I have often done this without thinking about it, since it is just part of our life.

"Now that I am in Taizé, I see many things in my own country with different eyes. The solidarity I am speaking about, which is so natural for us, would need, I think, to be rooted in a prayer which is not a «formality» but an inner renewal. It would be useful for us to recognize our differences more clearly. If relations between Christians and Muslims are peaceful in our society, that is only because the law imposes rules of security that make it possible to co-exist. I have understood better now that this co-existence must go beyond merely the tolerance of a pluralism. Inner prayer can help us to develop an interest in others and a respect for our differences." ■

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